IN THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application. Please cancel original claims 1-11, and add new claims 12-30 as follows:

Claims 1-11. (Cancelled)

12. (New) A process for laser beam welding with reduced formation of end craters, comprising

moving a laser beam along a segment to be welded to form a weld seam having an end, and

as the laser beam approaches the seam end, distancing the focus of the laser beam from the surface to be welded.

13. (New) The process according to Claim 12, wherein

the welding speed is reduced towards the seam end, and/or

at the seam end a local beam movement occurs sideways beyond the seam.

14. (New) The process according to Claim 12, wherein the local beam movement is in the shape of a decreasing spiral narrowing around the center of the seam end.

15. (New) The process according to Claim 12, wherein the local beam movement is in the shape of a circular movement or

gyration superimposed transverse to the seam about the center of the seam end.

16. (New) The process according to Claim 12, wherein the defocusing of the laser beam occurs along a linear progression.

17. (New) The process according to Claim 12, wherein said laser welding is carried out with a laser scanner.

18. (New) The process according to Claim 12, wherein the terminal seam segment within which the power, speed or focus is varied, or in which the lateral beam movement occurs, has a length of 2 to 5 mm.

19. (New) The process according to Claim 18, wherein within the seam segment the laser output is reduced from 2000 - 1500 Watt to 500 - 0 Watt.

20. (New) The process according to Claim 18, wherein the laser beam travels through the seam segment within 50 to 100 ms.

21. (New) The process according to Claim 12, wherein the width of the lateral beam movement laterally to the weld seam is 1 to 5 mm to each side.

22. (New) A process for laser beam welding with reduced formation of end craters, wherein the laser beam power is reduced at the seam end, and wherein

the welding speed is reduced towards the seam end, and/or

a beam movement occurs projecting locally laterally beyond the seam, and/or

towards the seam end the focus of the laser beam is distanced from the surface to be welded.

23. (New) The process according to Claim 22, wherein the local beam movement is in the shape of a decreasing spiral narrowing around the center of the seam end.

24. (New) The process according to Claim 22, wherein the local beam movement is in the shape of a circular movement or gyration superimposed transverse to the seam about the center of the seam end.

25. (New) The process according to Claim 22, wherein the defocusing of the laser beam occurs along a linear progression.

26. (New) The process according to Claim 22, wherein said laser welding is carried out with a laser scanner.

27. (New) The process according to Claim 22, wherein the terminal seam segment within which the power, speed or focus is varied, or in which the lateral beam movement occurs, has a length of 2 to 5 mm.

28. (New) The process according to Claim 27, wherein within the seam segment the laser output is reduced from 2000 - 1500 Watt to 500 - 0 Watt.

29. (New) The process according to Claim 27, wherein the laser beam travels through the seam segment within 50 to 100 ms.

30. (New) The process according to Claim 22, wherein the width of the lateral beam movement laterally to the weld seam is 1 to 5 mm to each side.